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The ABC's of the Cattle Cycle

A LOOK at the chart at the top of the next page will give you a good idea of the "A" in the ABC's of the cattle cycle.

You'll notice that the top line marked "total cattle" moves up and down in a fairly regular pattern over the years. It's these periodic ups and down in cattle numbers that have given us the term "cattle cycle." No two cycles have been exactly alike. Yet they are similar enough to suggest that what has happened over the last 7 or 8 decades can be useful in helping us size up what's in store for the future.

Why do numbers of cattle run in these long cycles? It's a complicated story and we haven't the space for a detailed discussion. To some extent, these long swings in the number of cattle are due to the nature of the critters. From the time a cow is bred until she drops her calf—and she has only one—takes 9 months. It takes another 18 months to raise a calf into a yearling steer ready for marketing off grass; an additional 6-10 months is required if he goes into the feedlot for finishing. The time required to raise cattle to market weight is the reason why the production cycle is longer than for hogs or poultry.

Probably more important in explaining the cycle in cattle production is the fact that large numbers of farmers decide at about the same time to increase the sizes of their herds or to reduce them. These decisions probably are based on the net returns from cattle raising—both past returns and those producers expect to get in the future. Feed grain and pasture supplies also help determine whether farmers increase or decrease herds.

Study Past Cycles

Let's note some of the similarities in the 5 cycles that have occurred since the late 1800's. The upward swing of each cycle has lasted from 6 to 8 years. In each case, the number at the peak of the cycle was about one-third larger than at the beginning.

The length of the declines in the cycles shows more difference—varying

from 4 to 10 years. The amount of decline ranges from 10 to 20 percent. With numbers going up more than they go down, the general trend in the number of cattle in this country has been upward.

Changes in Kind of Cattle and Changes in Slaughter

Changes in the kind and ages of cattle on hand as numbers go up and down provide the "B" of the cattle cycle. As the chart shows, most of the changes have been in beef cattle. Numbers of milk cows have trended upward pretty steadily. When farmers are building up cattle herds they hold back breeding stock and young stuff, particularly calves and heifers. Later on all classes of cattle share in the gain as young stuff matures. As numbers approach a peak, cows continue to climb but relatively fewer calves and heifers are added to herds.

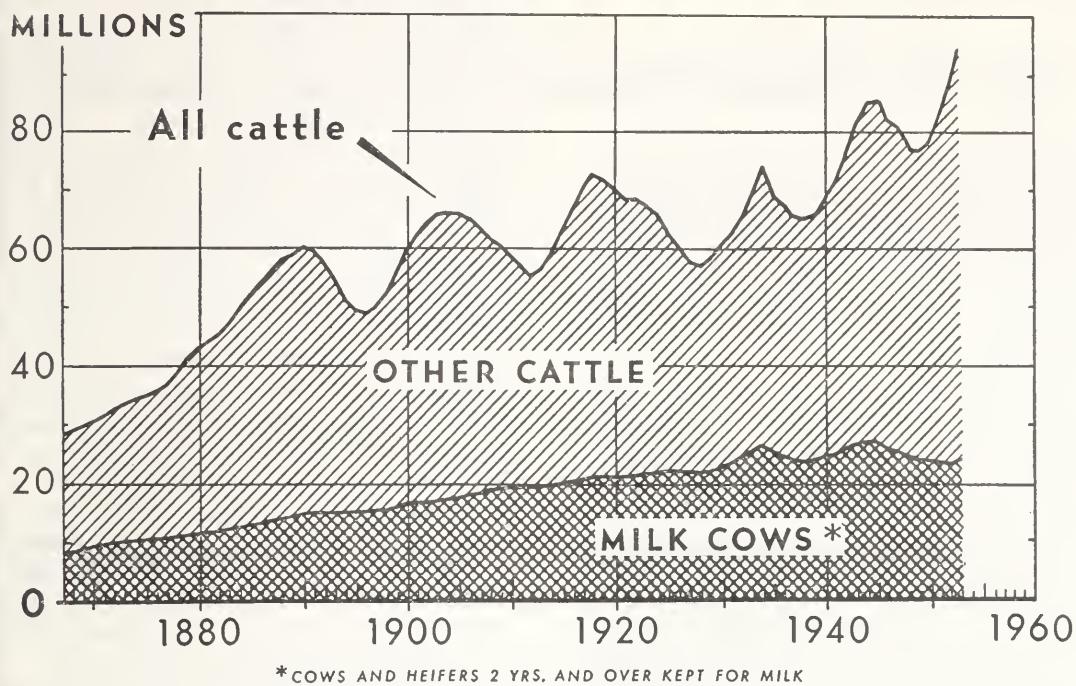
The "A" and "B" set the stage for the "C" aspect of the cattle cycle—*changes in slaughter*. Marketings for slaughter drop when numbers on farms are being increased rapidly, ordinarily reaching a low point 2 or 3 years after the upswing has begun. Much of the cattle going to market in the first 2 or 3 years of the upswing are fed steers and heifers.

After the second or third year, slaughter starts increasing. More heifers and steers are ready for sale. More calves and yearlings are sold and more cattle move to market without having their turn in the feed lot. The peak in marketings for slaughter is reached after the cycle turns downward. At that time, farmers are marketing all classes of cattle in volume but cows and calves make up a larger proportion than at other times. When the cycle is going downhill, marketings of cows usually are greater than at any other point of the cycle.

Present Cycle Began in '49

That, briefly, is what history has to tell us about the cattle cycle. Now, how does all this apply to the cycle we are now in?

CATTLE ON FARMS JAN. 1



You'll see from the chart that we started increasing the number of cattle in 1949. The gain since then has been a little sharper than in past cycles. By January 1 of this year the number of cattle reached a record 93.7 million head, 17 million more than when the cycle began.

Slaughter reached a low point 2 years after the upswing began. During this time slaughter of finished steers was high. Last year—the fourth in the current cycle—slaughter began to increase rapidly. During the first 3 months of this year, it was over one-fifth greater than a year earlier. Marketings of fed stock have continued heavy but sales of cattle directly off grass also picked up. However, the number of cattle on farms is continuing to increase. Despite the sharp increase in slaughter since mid-1952, the Nation's herd is reproducing faster than it is being slaughtered.

So far, the current cycle seems to be running generally about the same as those of the past. If it continues to

behave in the same way as former cycles, we could expect the number of cattle in this country to reach a peak of 98 or 99 million head about 1955. The high point in marketings would come later when farmers are cutting their herds. It should be emphasized that the statement "98 or 99 million head about 1955," is not a forecast that the number of cattle will reach that level on that date. It is simply a sizing-up of what *could* happen, based on what has happened in the past.

There are good reasons for expecting the present cycle to continue to develop in a way that resembles past cycles. However, it's highly unlikely to develop in exactly the same way. For instance, drought, by reducing feed supplies, might force farmers to liquidate herds and hold the peak well below 98 or 99 million head. Exceptionally favorable weather, on the other hand, could extend the length of the cycle, and cattle numbers, in that event, might pass current projections.

Earl E. Miller
Bureau of Agricultural Economics

What's Happened to Sweetpotatoes?

IN THE short space of years from 1946 to 1952, the annual production of sweetpotatoes has fallen from 61 million bushels down to 28 million bushels. What caused this sudden sharp drop, and how lasting is it likely to be?

These questions are of real importance to consumers. Sweetpotatoes have high nutritional value. Compared with other items in a list of 26 common fresh vegetables, sweetpotatoes contain the least percentage of water, the highest percentage of carbohydrate, and the largest number of calories per pound. Sweetpotatoes also are valuable as a source of vitamin A. Besides, sweetpotatoes are good to eat and relished by nearly everyone.

More than four-fifths of all our sweetpotatoes are grown in the South-eastern States, from Oklahoma and Texas eastward. Six leading States produced 70 percent of the total crop in 1952. These States, in decreasing order of importance—1952 crop—are Louisiana, North Carolina, Virginia, New Jersey, South Carolina, and Georgia. The rest of the crop comes from 16 other States. Louisiana's crop was less than 10 percent of the total during 1930-39, but made up 28 percent in 1952.

Fewer Produced—Less for Home Use

During the last 15 to 20 years, acreage and production of sweetpotatoes have shrunk in each of the 22 producing States, although more sharply in some than in others. The relative position of Louisiana, North Carolina, Virginia, New Jersey, California, and Maryland has risen in sweetpotato production, while that of Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Texas has declined.

The general decline in acreage and production has been accompanied by a shift in use made of the crop. Since

1935, the quantity used in farm households has declined by 23 million bushels, compared with a decline of only 14 million bushels in the quantity sold.

In 1935, about 30 million bushels or 37 percent of the United States crop was used in farm households. About the same quantity was sold. The rest was fed to livestock, used for home-grown seed, or wasted. In 1952, only about 7 million bushels or 26 percent of the crop was consumed in farm households. Only about 16 million bushels were sold in 1952, but this was 55 percent of the total crop. Clearly then, the sweetpotato has declined as a home-use crop in all areas, while as a commercial crop it has more nearly held its own and in some areas, as in Louisiana, it has gained ground.

In Louisiana, the quantity used in farm households dropped from nearly 3 million bushels to 640 thousand bushels, while the quantity sold actually increased from 4 million in 1935 to 6 million bushels in 1952.

With climate and custom favoring sweetpotatoes in the South, why has production declined so drastically since the peak in 1932?

For one thing, the crop takes a lot of work. Much hand and "stoop" labor is used in such operations as preparing the seedbed, transplanting; and at harvesttime, in clearing away the vines, digging the potatoes, and picking them up. In contrast, the commercial production of Irish potatoes is now largely mechanized.

Another problem for sweetpotatoes is that of extending the marketing season beyond the immediate harvesttime. To keep sweetpotatoes satisfactorily on a large scale requires, first, careful harvesting to avoid cuts and bruises, then a controlled curing process, and finally storage within a limited range of temperature and humidity. Handling like this is beyond the means of small producers acting individually. The development of large-scale sweetpotato drying houses therefore has been led largely by well-financed shipping-point dealers, large-scale commercial producers and cooperative associations.

In commercial growing areas farmers have made much progress in controlling the sweetpotato root weevil and in preventing rot in storage. However,

What'll You Tell Him About That Place in the Country?

WHAT advice can you give a friend who thinks he wants to take up part-time farming?

Well, for one thing you can tell him that many are already trying it. The 1950 census lists two-thirds million

largely because sweetpotatoes bruise too easily, not much headway has been made in mechanization.

Also, people in the Southeast have been largely employed at relatively high wages in recent years. Most of them have had less time and less need to grow sweetpotatoes for home use than previously.

Finally, in the last few years, some farmers in the sweetpotato areas have found other crops more profitable. This situation, of course, could change in the years ahead if the domestic or export markets for some of the alternative crops shrink in proportion to production, or if acreage allotments are put into effect for some of these crops.

This Year and the Future

The relatively high prices paid by consumers for sweetpotatoes in northern markets during years of scarce supplies show that a strong demand exists. The slight acreage increase intended by growers for this year indicates that they are responding to some extent to a price stimulus. If acreage intentions are carried out and growing conditions are average or better, the crop may come up to 35 million bushels this year, compared with last year's 28 million. However, with the growing abundance and variety of many fresh and frozen vegetables competing for the consumers' dollar, and with the shifts in agricultural opportunities in sweetpotato growing areas, sweetpotatoes seem unlikely to regain fully their former importance at any time in the near future.

Herbert W. Mumford, Jr.
Bureau of Agricultural Economics

part-time farmers in the United States. Besides these, another million "residential" farmers do a little farming for income. Altogether these small farms make up a third of all farms in the Nation.

What do these little farm operators have to tell us of their experience? Should still others go into this kind of farming? The experienced ones reply, "It all depends . . ."

The main ifs-and-ands of their collective advice are now brought together by the *Bureau of Agricultural Economics*, in a newly revised edition of Farmers' Bulletin 1966, "Part Time Farming," soon to be issued by the United States Department of Agriculture.

Besides his house and garden he should figure on about an acre and a quarter, say, to raise his own grain to feed a couple dozen hens and 40 chicks. For a cow he will need 2 additional acres to produce hay and pasture and three-quarters of an acre for grain. To board three pigs 6 months takes something like an acre each for grain and pasture. And to keep a horse requires three good acres to grow pasture, hay and grain. These estimates are based on acre yields of 2 tons of hay and 40 bushels of corn. If a family plans to raise only fruit and vegetables for home use, and maybe keep a few layers on bought feed, half an acre to an acre of good land might be enough.

Cost More Close to Town

Land near town is priced higher than land farther out. Its value to a part-time farmer will depend upon what he can raise on it and what it means to him as a place for a home. Usually he will have to go 20 to 30 miles out, from a large city, to get land cheap enough to use profitably as a farm. Closer in, he might have to be content with only a garden plot.

A large garden properly cared for will net him \$100 to \$300 a year in fresh and

preserved food for family use. But more labor, skill, and equipment and a larger investment are required to produce milk, meat, and most of the specialized crops, like honey, mushrooms, or foxes, or such unusual specialties as muskrats, frogs, goldfish, and squabs. Unless he has had some experience, he had better stick to his garden and the simpler crops at first and try out any specialty later on after he has got his hand in on essentials, and has had time to learn from what his neighbors have done. There's a lot to do and a lot to learn that first year.

The Pros and Cons

One should count both advantages and disadvantages before taking the plunge into part-time farming.

Here are some of the advantages:

A farm provides a wholesome and healthful environment for children.

It gives a measure of security if the part-time farmer's regular job is lost—provided the place is owned free of debt and earns enough income to meet fixed expenses and minimum living costs.

It furnishes exercise, and outside work, and recreation. Elderly and partially disabled people often find this type of life beneficial to their health.

It supplies the means for profitable use of spare-time family labor. It lowers the cost of living. And it makes work that to many people is recreational.

But you would be remiss if you failed to mention some of the disadvantages of part-time farming to your friend who asked for advice. You could say:

It's confining, especially if you raise livestock. In times of crisis on the farm you may get little sleep at night . . . between long, hard days of work, frequently in hot sun or cold rain.

It costs a lot of money to get started and to keep going. Not only is land near town expensive, but supplies and equipment come high.

It's hazardous. Drought, hail, disease, and insects destroy crops, and animal losses sometimes are disastrous. This cuts deeply into earnings and even capital.

Big *If* is your friend's chances for future happiness. If he has never farmed before, he will have to get used to a new way of life. Furthermore,

Two-Way Street

WITH 1 1/3 million families living on part-time and "residential farms," our readers may get the impression that all of these are families who once lived in the city, dreamed of a quiet life in the country, and then made their dreams come true. But this is not so.

Undoubtedly, a very large number have moved from the city; but we must remember, country folks have dreams too. They dream of the good money they can make from city jobs. So they . . . many of them . . . take jobs in town, and are then classed as "part-time" farmers. Probably more do this than the other way round, or so we are told.

Another thing to notice is that there are some families who live in the country, have a garden and keep a few chickens, but whose operations are not large enough to be counted by the Census as farms . . . even as "residential farms." This means that in terms of mere numbers the 1 1/3 million is a conservative figure.

plants and animals thrive best under happy owners who give them watchful care.

But having made up his mind, his next big question is the location of his farm. If he has a town job, he will want his farm close enough to commute handily. And if he plans to grow any produce for sale, he will need a market outlet not too far away. An all-weather farm-to-market and farm-to-job road will be essential.

He won't need a lot of land. Many part-time farms are small, some of them from half an acre to a few acres. In selecting one, a safe rule of thumb to follow is: Get a farm that has enough acreage to bring in the income expected, but not too much for the farmer and his family to keep up, along with their other work.

It can be burdensome if your place isn't paid for and you lose your regular job. For just growing enough to eat is not security.

Charles E. Rogers
Bureau of Agricultural Economics

Buying a Farm With or Without Family Help

New Study Indicates How It's Done in One State

IF YOU were a young farmer wanting to attain ownership of a family farm, what would *you* do?

If your family could help you with the initial capital, what sort of a plan would you work out, and how much of the purchase price would be required? Would you have to wait until your parents died and use your inheritance? Would you work on the home farm to save the needed capital? Or, would your family be able to furnish the money for the initial down payment?

If your family could not help you, what would you do? Would you work at nonfarm employment and save until you could make a down payment on a family-sized farm? Could you borrow the entire amount outside your family? Or, would you try to work your way up the ladder, first as farmhand, next as tenant, and finally as owner?

Every year, thousands of our farm youths are confronted with these questions. Maybe you're one of them. You must decide what to do and how to do it.

Your problems are getting more complicated. The amount of capital needed has gone up pretty fast. Land and buildings, machinery and equipment, livestock and supplies . . . all, are much higher priced than they were a few years ago. The way we do things on the farm, in this modern age of machines and new techniques, has increased the capital required for farming. In many areas, livestock production is of increasing importance, and this makes large investments necessary . . . not only for animals but for feed, pasture, and equipment.

You young men who are interested in farm ownership are thus confronted with the problem of how to acquire this large amount of capital.

A study in Virginia sheds some light on how some young men have solved this problem, and finally attained farm home ownership. It shows how a typical young couple can acquire

enough capital to buy an ownership interest in a farm of average value—as high as \$30,000. It shows that some young farm owners depend on family help in acquiring farm ownership. And it shows that some can get started in ownership without family assistance.

The study was made cooperatively by the *Virginia Agricultural Experiment Station* and the *Bureau of Agricultural Economics*. It was centered in Culpepper and Orange Counties, where beef cattle and dairying are the main enterprises. Forty-nine farm owners were included in the pilot study. All of them bought their farms between 1930 and 1951. For purposes of analysis the farms were sorted into two major groups: Those starting *without* family help, and those starting *with* family help.

Without Family Help

Twenty-one of these farmers got the capital with which to buy their first land without family help. They got their capital in 3 ways: Some of them saved enough to get started while working at a *nonfarm job*. Some borrowed what they needed from nonrelatives. A few in the group climbed the so-called *agricultural ladder*.

More than half of these young farmers accumulated capital with which to get started as farm owners by working at nonfarm employment. Practically all of these purchases were made in a time of growing prosperity . . . during and following World War II. That is to say, these farmers worked during a period favorable to rapid accumulation of capital. Farming was not a new venture to this group, however, since many of them had had farming experience before they bought their land.

These farmers who had no family help began farming with an average of 243 acres per farm and an average farm investment of \$16,744. The av-

verage cash investment, or down payment made by these farmers was relatively low at \$6,720, or about 40 percent of the total farm investment. Thus, the average indebtedness per farm was about 60 percent. Total investment was divided as follows: Land and buildings, \$12,030; machinery and equipment \$1,031; and livestock, \$3,683. Sixteen of the twenty-one farms have remained the same size since purchase. Some farms, however, were bought so recently that their operators haven't had enough time to accumulate capital to buy additional land. Furthermore, many of the recent purchases were large enough to make unnecessary the practice of adding tract after tract to get an economic unit. Only 3 of these young farmers added more land to their original purchase. And 2 of the 21 had changed farms completely since they first became farm owners.

With Family Help

Twenty-eight farmers, among those surveyed, had some kind of family help to get started into ownership. And they got their help in one of three ways: *Inheritance, family financing, and working on the home farm.*

In this group, more of them got their start through inheritance than any other way. The inheritance usually was some interest in farm real estate—only two cases involved cash inheritance. Inheritance of land ranged from a one-sixth interest in 211 acres to a full interest in 365 acres. The years of initial land acquisition of these owners were about equally divided between the 1930's and the 1940's. Thus, the relatively low average farm investment of \$11,547 was influenced by the fact that several of the operators made their initial purchases during the 1930's when land values were still comparatively low. The average initial investment made by these operators was \$7,272, or 62 percent of the total farm investment, leaving an average indebtedness of less than 40 percent. This is in contrast to those operators without family help, whose average indebtedness was about 63 percent.

Here again land and buildings made up most of the farm investment, with an average of \$8,576. Machinery and equipment averaged \$1,111 and live-

stock \$1,860 per farm. Unlike the *without-family-help* group, those *with family help* showed considerable interest in buying additional land and in building up their farms to economic-sized units. Only 6 of the 28 farms in this group were as big when bought as they are today. The other 22 are farms that have since been enlarged . . . either by purchase, by inheritance, or both. Three of the operators were sons who did not own a full interest in their respective farms. In these cases, the fathers were very old and in poor health, and the sons made all of the managerial decisions even though they owned only a partial interest in the farm real estate.

As a young man, the chances are that you would use one or more of these six methods in getting started in farm ownership. The hardest thing is to get money for the down payment. The best solution to this problem has to be determined, of course, by individual circumstances.

The process of getting started on a small tract and adding to it, piece by piece, is now practiced much less in Virginia than formerly. Also, contrary to popular opinion, few farmers in this area during recent years have climbed the so-called agricultural ladder from farm laborer to tenant, to mortgaged owner, to full owner. Work at nonfarm employment was more prevalent than we had expected. Thus, high industrial activity has evidently added a new process by which young men can attain ownership of farm homes.

If the opportunity for rapid accumulation of capital by working in industry should decrease very much, farm youth without help from the family will find it hard to get started in farm home ownership. Unless farm ownership is to become virtually a closed shop—with farms handed down from father to son, from generation to generation—the road must be kept open for young men without family help to break into the ownership column. In the absence of lucrative off-farm employment, it may be necessary for many farmers to get loans to finance a large proportion of the farms they buy.

Frank D. Hansing, Cooperative Agent
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and
Bureau of Agricultural Economics

Which Cow Is The Better Buy?

MANY DAIRYMEN find it pays them to buy a few cows for herd replacements. And when it comes time to buy one, it is always hard to choose the best cow from those available. However, there are some "tricks of the trade" that help here. If you are a dairyman and have this problem, you would do well to keep them in mind.

Generally, the man who has a dairy cow to sell names the price he wants for her. This price usually takes into account the cow's physical condition and her proved or probable ability as a milk producer. However, largely owing to competitive beef prices, the price range between the best and the poorest dairy cow is fairly narrow.

This situation is one to watch for. If you are on the alert for it, a little figuring can lead you toward profitable purchases.

Some Points to Consider

Before deciding to buy a cow for herd replacement, make an estimate of her future milk production possibilities and life expectancy in the herd.

Pedigree by itself doesn't guarantee high production. Neither does dairy type or appearance, although it is one indication.

The best basis for an estimate, however, is a complete production record. If you can't get a record for longer, and you know the approximate date of freshening, even one day's record will help a lot. From this, it's possible to judge annual production within a reasonable margin of error. But take into full account the condition under which the record was made. Look at the age of the cow, how well she has been fed and handled, how she has been managed in the past.

Important, too, is the cow's expected future herd life. In general, a cow in the age group of 2 to 5 years can be expected to live about 4 additional years. A cow in the age group of 5 to 8 years can be expected to live about 3½ years. A cow in the age group of

8 to 11 years can be expected to live about 2½ more years.

Sharpen Your Pencil

With these things taken care of, you are ready to do some figuring. Say you want to choose between one of two cows. Let's call them cow A and cow B. Suppose your estimate of cow A's production per year is 10,000 pounds and that for cow B is 8,500 pounds. Suppose both cows were in the same herd with similar management. Cow A is 6 years old and cow B is 4 years old. The asking price for cow A is \$375 and cow B \$300. Which is the better buy?

Suppose your estimate of a year's milk income is \$400 for cow A and \$340 for cow B, based on a price estimate of \$4 per hundredweight for milk. And suppose you judge that cow A will eat 2,000 pounds of grain in a year, and that cow B will take 1,700 pounds. Now make an estimate of the future grain price for the year. Let us say you figured the grain bill for cow A would be \$80 per year and for cow B \$68 per year. Therefore, for cow A milk income above grain costs would be \$320 and for cow B \$272.

Next, look at depreciation. The figures given here are just examples. Say that the purchase price for cow A is \$375. With an estimated salvage value of \$150, total net depreciation would be \$225. With the same salvage value for cow B and the purchase price set at \$300, total net depreciation would be \$150. Dividing the total depreciation by the expected future herd life of the cow (3½ years for cow A, 4 years for cow B), the net depreciation cost per year for cow A would be \$64 and for cow B \$38.

For cow A the difference between net income above grain costs and yearly depreciation is \$256 (\$320 minus \$64). For cow B the difference is \$234.

Therefore, cow A will annually return \$22 more net income than will cow B. If the difference in returns

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Outlook Highlights

• • • • June 1953

The general economic situation continues to be described in such phrases as "heavy factory production, record employment, and rising income."

So far as farmers are concerned, they have marketed a larger volume of products, so far this year, than in the same period last year, but, with prices lower, their cash receipts . . . January through April . . . were down 2 percent.

Slight Decline in Land Values

Lower prices for farm products and greater uncertainty about future income probably were the main factors in the 2 percent decline in farm real estate values from November 1952 to March 1953.

Milk Production Higher

Milk output first 4 months of 1953 is up 7 percent. This rate of gain is expected to diminish, but total output for '53 probably will top 1952's 115 billion pounds by about 3 billion.

Poultry and Eggs

For as many years as we have records, poultrymen have raised more

Which Cow is the Better Buy?

(Continued from page 9)

between cows is quite small, it is obviously a matter of indifference which cow is purchased. However, in such a case, if the purchase price of the two cows is greatly different, then interest charges will determine the best buy. In this example the purchase price of cow A exceeds that of cow B by \$75. This difference compounded at the interest rate of 5 percent for 3½ years (future herd life of cow A) will average \$4 per year and will still leave cow A—the higher priced cow—as the better buy.

G. E. Frick

Bureau of Agricultural Economics

W. F. Henry

New Hampshire Agr. Experiment Station

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chickens for laying flock replacement if the egg-feed price ratio was up very much over the previous spring. So far, this spring has proved an exception. The ratio is much more favorable than last year but, to May 1, about the same number of chicks were being raised for flock replacement as in the same period last spring. An increase in replacement chickens is still likely; but, with the major hatching season approaching an end, the increase is not likely to be large. Production of *turkey poults* to May 1 this season in 14 major states was down 19 percent from a year ago. Heavy breeds were off 16 percent; light breeds, 28 percent.

Fats and Oils

Stocks of *edible* vegetable oils are large, and carryover next October 1 is expected to be a record . . . most of them owned by CCC. Disappearance of *inedible* tallow and grease has been running a fifth above a year ago . . . with exports high. Supplies will continue far above domestic needs and not much change in prices is expected.

Wheat

Prospects for the *winter* wheat crop are a little more favorable than in March and April. May 1 estimate was 730 million bushels compared with last year's crop of 1,053 million. May wheat prices except for red winter wheat were from 10 to 15 cents below loan levels for the 1952 crop, though above levels reached earlier this season.

Cattle and Hog Prospects

About the usual seasonal changes in prices of meat animals can be expected this summer. Fed cattle prices will probably remain close to present levels until marketings of fat cattle ease off this summer and may strengthen at that time. Prices for grass cattle will likely make a general seasonal decline this summer.

Reflecting the smaller hog production, prices of hogs have been advancing rather steadily since last December. The favorable price outlook for hogs this summer will likely result in larger farrowings this fall than last.

The "Once-Over" of Some of Our Less-Talked-About Crops

ARMERS usually grow the crops or livestock best suited to their localities and to the resources of their particular farms. But enterprising farmers are ever on the alert for new or substitute crops for additional income. It is well to know something about such crops because you want to know *what to avoid* as well as what to plant.

Often grown with the idea of either a quick profit, a long-shot side issue, or as a last resort, are such crops as mustard seed, rapeseed, safflower, sunflower, spelt, buckwheat, popcorn, broomcorn, and mung beans. In years of good prices some of these crops have proved profitable. But, because the demand for them is limited, it is fairly easy to overproduce them. When that occurs, glutted markets and the accompanying low prices cause farmers to lose interest in the crop the following year. For this reason it is usually best, if at all possible, to produce such crops under contract.

If you do grow these crops, you should try to get a contract price high enough so that the net dollar return per acre is at least as much as you would expect to get from the standard crop grown in the area. Farmers sometimes do take less, of course, for a substitute crop, because they need to get some sort of return from available acreage, when it is too late to plant the crop usually grown.

Some of these minor crops require special handling, or more labor, and cost more to produce than major crops.

The farmer who has not had experience with growing a crop like broomcorn, for instance, is apt to be lured by the price of \$400 a ton, not thinking in advance about the large amount of labor required and the need for timeliness at harvest. In the end, he finds that the cost to grow and cultivate was only a small part of the cost of production, but that the bulk of the expense

MAJOR CROPS like corn, wheat, cotton, rice, tobacco, and some others, affect the lives of a great many people, and play a big part in our entire national economy. For this reason relatively more of our statisticians' and analysts' time, and more of our printed space, is given to the leading crops. There is interest, however, in crops about which we hear very little; and space will be given in the *Agricultural Situation*, from time to time, for discussion of some of them . . . especially crops about which readers often inquire, and those that experience unusual shifts or changes in production.

was in harvesting, curing, threshing, baling and marketing.

In the case of another crop—mustard seed—farmers have been known to pay 12 cents a pound for planting seed and to have received only 3 to 4 cents a pound for the crop after they got it produced.

Similar experiences with other crops account for some of the shifts in growing areas and sharp changes in production from year to year.

Many Ups and Downs

In making plans to grow such crops, it should be remembered that the forces that operate on major crops also govern prices of the lesser-known crops. But the ups and downs of supply and demand are usually more pronounced than for the major crops. Present-day transportation facilities, both at home and abroad, have brought the production areas of the world closer together. Our production comes into competition with similar products from neighbor countries and from abroad. For various reasons, large tonnages of some lesser-known crops are imported into the United States, and equally large tonnages of others are exported.

Let us suppose you are a farmer living in an area where some of these minor crops may be grown and you

want to select one. What are the income prospects for you? You'll need to find out a great deal more than we can give you in this short article. However, production figures and prices received by growers for the last 10 years for some of these crops may be helpful. Such information is shown in the table on page 13.

But again, statistics of production and price do not tell the whole story. Each of the crops shown in the table has a history well worth knowing, both for economic and educational reasons. We have space here to discuss only two—mustard seed and broomcorn.

Mustard Mainly Grown in the West

Production of mustard seed on a commercial scale is confined mostly to Montana and California, although this crop can be grown in many other areas. Mustard has been grown also in the Dakotas, Nebraska, Kansas, Washington, Oregon, Ohio, and Tennessee.

The estimates of production shown in the table include three main kinds of mustard: (1) Yellow (*Brassica alba*), (2) brown (*Brassica juncea*), and (3) Oriental, the yellow seeded form of brown mustard. Yellow mustard usually commands the highest price. This kind is used mostly for condiments—ground into mustard flour and used for edible purposes. Some is also used whole as a spice in pickling. If the seed coat of the brown mustard is removed from the ground seed, the flour may also be used as prepared mustard, for seasoning food products.

Because of its greater strength when used as a poultice, brown mustard is usually considered more desirable for medicinal purposes. During the war years of the last decade, when there was a shortage of fats and oils, large quantities—over 16 million pounds in one year—of brown mustard, mostly the Oriental, were crushed for oil. The wild black mustard, so common as a weed in some sections of the country, is not included in estimates of production; although it has some commercial value as a source of oil.

During the last 7 years, domestic production has been heavily supplemented by imports . . . mostly from Canada, Denmark, Netherlands, United Kingdom, Italy, France, Australia, and sev-

eral South American countries. Before the conflict in Korea, large quantities were imported from China. Imports of whole seed from 1943 through 1952 in order, in pounds, were as follows: 701,000, 281,000, 1,642,000, 7,216,000, 9,178,000, 9,990,000, 8,098,000, 16,063,000, 25,373,000, and 30,473,842 pounds.

In some years, as in 1950 and in 1952, imports have been larger than our total domestic production. Thus, you must reckon with imports in determining whether to grow mustard on a commercial scale. In addition to the kinds of mustard discussed here, there are many other kinds, including several varieties used as "greens," for table use.

Broomcorn, the Migrant Crop

Broomcorn is really not corn. It is a sorghum. But it differs from other sorghums in that it produces heads having long fibers which form a brush used almost exclusively for making brooms. Broomcorn was first grown in the United States by Benjamin Franklin. But it was first grown commercially about 1797, in Massachusetts.

From there, broomcorn production shifted westward to New York, Ohio, Illinois, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, Colorado, and New Mexico. The crop was also formerly grown in Virginia, Tennessee, Missouri, Iowa, and Nebraska. In general, the westward movement of broomcorn represented a shifting to cheaper lands, or to lands less desirable for other crops.

The 1950 Census of Agriculture shows that in 1949 there were some 5,000 growers of broomcorn. Of that number, 1,878 were in Oklahoma; 1,464 in Texas; 692 in New Mexico; 447 in Colorado; 188 in Illinois; 102 in Kansas; and a few in Pennsylvania, Missouri, Tennessee, and some other States.

Broomcorn varieties are classed as standard and dwarf. Yields of brush average about 600 pounds per acre under favorable conditions, but only about 250 pounds under conditions of limited moisture.

This crop is relatively easy to grow. One bushel of broomcorn seed, weighing 48 pounds, is sufficient to plant 16 to 24 acres. Broomcorn requires about the same cultivation as grain sorghums. Harvesting costs are high and much labor is required to handle a field of

broomcorn. About 10 to 14 days of man labor are required to harvest, cure, thresh, and bale a ton of cured brush. There are 40,000 to 70,000 heads in a ton of cured brush, and each head must be cut or pulled separately by hand. The necessity of harvesting promptly to prevent overripeness requires the use of large crews. Special equipment for threshing, curing, and baling is required, and in recent years of high labor costs, much effort was made to develop suitable harvesting machinery.

Imports of broomcorn, mostly from Italy, Mexico, and Argentina, are becoming increasingly important as

sources of supply. The 10-year average imports are 3,474 short tons. This tonnage is partly offset by average exports of 2,248 tons—practically all to Canada. The current rate of duty on imported broomcorn is \$10 per short ton. Domestic requirements for the United States are 38,000 to 40,000 tons annually.

Because of the rather inelastic demand for broomcorn, prices received by growers fluctuate widely with variations in the size of the crop.

T. J. Kuzelka
Bureau of Agricultural Economics

Production and Farm Prices of Mustard Seed, Broomcorn, Mung Beans, Popcorn, and Buckwheat, 1943-52

Year	Mustard seed		Mung beans		Broomcorn		Popcorn		Buckwheat	
	Production	Price to growers	Production	Price to growers	Production	Price to growers	Production	Price to growers	Production	Price to growers
1943	1,000 lbs. pounds	Per 100	1,000 lbs. pounds	Per 100	Tons	Per ton	1,000 lbs.	Per 100	1,000 bu.	Per bu.
1943-----	34,590	\$5.60	6,300	\$8.00	36,200	\$267	126,485	\$4.32	8,830	\$1.26
1944-----	29,780	6.10	11,000	14.50	69,200	215	234,747	3.77	8,956	1.01
1945-----	25,950	7.83	24,200	10.00	40,300	259	420,080	3.69	6,467	1.19
1946-----	35,360	9.03	14,700	8.00	43,500	292	250,152	3.51	6,812	1.48
1947-----	20,990	8.47	10,000	8.00	34,400	300	102,900	4.73	7,177	1.90
1948-----	19,480	7.97	16,000	5.40	30,000	308	305,525	4.33	6,085	1.12
1949-----	11,200	7.29	8,800	4.00	45,700	214	165,023	3.23	4,956	.953
1950-----	17,910	6.58	13,950	4.00	27,100	368	242,070	3.16	4,439	1.11
1951-----	19,310	7.49	4,000	6.00	33,800	436	205,149	4.34	3,340	1.40
1952-----	13,540	6.52	600	18.00	29,100	413	253,089	4.46	3,163	1.48

Outlook Highlights

(Continued from page 10)

Feed Grains

Stocks of feed grains next October 1 probably will be up about a third from a year earlier. Farmers fed about 9 percent less concentrates to livestock in the first half of the feeding year than in the same period of 1951-52. There were fewer hogs and poultry on farms, and less was fed per animal unit.

Big Irish Potato Crop

A sharp increase in acreage and generally good yield prospects point to the second largest late spring Irish potato crop on record. Gain over last year is about 29 percent. Prices to farmers are likely to continue lower than a year ago.

Cotton

United States mills are consuming more cotton than a year ago but exports continue

at only about half the 1951-52 level. On the 15th of May, the CCC held about 2 million bales under loan, 13 percent of last year's crop. A year earlier, 374 thousand bales were under CCC loan.

Wool

United States mills used almost a fifth more apparel wool in early 1953 than a year earlier. Use of carpet wool was up 27 percent. Wool prices abroad have recovered most of the decline of early April. Boston quotations for fine wools also have advanced.

Tobacco

Auctions for Maryland tobacco opened May 5, and through mid-May prices averaged 14 percent above those for the same period last year. Acreage allotments for flue-cured and burley are lower than for last year's crops. With stocks large, supplies in the 1953-54 marketing season probably will be up a little from 1952-53.

A Letter to Crop & Livestock Reporters

WHAT IS A WEED? Everyone knows a weed, but just try to explain it sometime.

Several years ago I was showing a friend of mine how I used a row of perennial sunflowers as a background for a flower border. He was polite enough, but didn't seem to share my enthusiasm. Finally he broke down and told me that he had spent so much of his young life chopping those "darn things" out of the cornfield, they didn't

look good to him, no matter where you put them. I found out what he meant; because, since that time, I have spent a good many hours trying to chop them out of my yard. So, if you started out to make a list of what you considered weeds and circulated it around a wide area, I am sure you would find out that a lot of people would disagree with you.

Which all comes down to the fact that a weed turns out to be a plant growing where it is not wanted. They get in the way, use up fertilizer and moisture that is needed for the crop you are producing, and generally cause a lot of extra bother and work.

Every now and then a weed pops up in our work. Take, for example, the statement that was published recently

(Continued on page 16)

Prices of Farm Products

[Estimates of average prices received by farmers at local farm markets based on reports to the Bureau of Agricultural Economics. Average of reports covering the United States weighted according to relative importance of district and State]

Commodity	Average		May 15, 1952	Apr. 15, 1953	May 15, 1953	Effective parity price May 15, 1953 ²
	Base period price ¹	January 1947- December 1949				
Basic commodities:						
Cotton American upland (pound)	cents	12.4	31.21	36.02	31.45	31.73
Wheat (bushel)	dollars	4.884	2.14	2.13	2.08	2.06
Rice (cwt.)	do	1.92	5.38	5.47	6.99	7.02
Corn (bushel)	do	4.642	1.64	1.70	1.46	1.49
Peanuts (pound)	cents	4.8	10.2	10.4	11.1	11.2
Designated nonbasic commodities:						
Potatoes (bushel)	dollars	510.577	1.60	2.62	1.34	1.15
Butterfat in cream (pound)	cents	26.7	71.2	71.6	65.4	65.1
All milk, wholesale (100 lb.) ³	dollars	1.68	4.42	4.44	4.12	73.95
Wool (pound)	cents	521.0	46.0	53.0	53.4	55.1
Other nonbasic commodities:						
Barley (bushel)	dollars	.488	1.37	1.28	1.30	1.24
Cottonseed (ton)	do	25.90	71.60	60.80	63.10	61.80
Flaxseed (bushel)	do	1.62	5.54	3.62	3.57	3.45
Oats (bushel)	do	.317	.852	.822	.763	.749
Rye (bushel)	do	.605	1.82	1.65	1.49	1.40
Sorghum, grain (100 lb.)	do	41.21	2.53	2.60	2.52	2.48
Soybeans (bushel)	do	.996	2.84	2.77	2.81	2.78
Sweetpotatoes (bushel)	do	.964	2.36	4.33	4.09	4.13
Beef cattle (100 lb.)	do	107.54	20.20	27.80	17.30	17.50
All chickens (pound)	cents	11.0	29.3	24.4	27.2	26.5
Eggs (dozen)	do	421.5	46.6	34.2	45.5	45.9
Hogs (100 lb.)	dollars	107.26	21.90	19.20	20.70	23.10
Lambs (100 lb.)	do	8.19	21.90	26.10	20.80	22.40
Calves (100 lb.)	do	108.39	22.60	30.50	19.60	19.80
Oranges, on tree (box)	do	82.29	1.23	1.13	1.34	1.41
Apples (bushel)	do	.996	2.39	2.84	3.29	3.42
Hay, baled (ton)	do	411.87	22.40	23.40	23.60	22.70

¹ Adjusted base period prices 1910-14, based on 120-month average January 1942-December 1951 unless otherwise noted.

² Parity prices are computed under the provisions of title III, subtitle A, section 301 (a) of the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1938 as amended by the Agricultural Acts of 1948 and 1949.

³ 60-month average, August 1909-July 1914 for all cotton.

⁴ 60-month average, August 1909-July 1914.

⁵ Adjust base period price 1910-14 derived from 10-season average prices 1943-52.

⁶ Prices received by farmers are estimates for the month.

⁷ Preliminary.

⁸ 10-season average 1919-28.

⁹ Transitional parity, 80 percent of parity price computed under formula in use prior to Jan. 1, 1950.

¹⁰ Revised.

Economic Trends Affecting Agriculture

Year and month	Industrial production (1935-39=100) ¹	Total personal income payments (1935-39=100) ²	Average earnings of factory workers per worker (1910-14=100)	Wholesale prices of all commodities (1910-14=100) ³	Index numbers of prices paid by farmers (1910-14=100)			Index numbers of prices received by farmers (1910-14=100)			
					Commodities	Wage rates for hired farm labor ⁴	Commodities, interest, taxes and wage rates	Livestock and products			
					Dairy products	Poultry and eggs	Meat animals	All live-stock			
1910-14 average	58	-----	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
1925-29 average	98	-----	232	143	151	184	161	161	155	145	152
1935-39 average	100	100	199	118	124	121	125	119	108	117	115
1947-49 average	185	294	462	225	240	430	249	275	224	334	291
1950 average	200	330	5 518	232	246	425	255	247	181	340	278
1951 average	220	370	5 563	258	271	470	281	284	226	411	335
1952 average	219	388	5 592	251	273	503	286	302	203	358	307
1952											
May	211	385	581	251	276	-----	289	281	175	394	313
June	204	388	5 582	250	273	-----	286	277	181	380	306
July	193	384	5 570	251	273	506	286	286	208	376	312
August	215	393	5 586	252	274	-----	287	295	225	372	316
September	228	399	5 607	251	271	-----	285	307	227	349	309
October	230	402	5 613	250	269	499	282	316	228	328	301
November	234	402	5 613	249	268	-----	281	318	238	310	295
December	235	408	5 628	246	267	-----	280	309	221	291	280
1953											
January	236	409	5 622	247	267	514	282	296	218	303	281
February	240	409	5 621	246	264	-----	280	286	206	305	277
March	242	412	627	247	265	-----	281	277	216	301	274
April			622	246	264	508	279	264	218	299	270
May					264	-----	279	257	218	317	277
Year and month	Index numbers of prices received by farmers (1910-14=100)										
	Crops								All crops and live-stock	Parity ratio ⁵	
	Food grains	Feed grains and hay	To-bacco	Cotton	Oil-bearing crops	Fruit	Truck crops	All crops			
1910-14 average	100	100	100	100	100	100	-----	.100	100	100	100
1925-29 average	141	118	169	150	135	146	145	143	148	92	
1935-39 average	94	95	172	87	113	95	95	99	107	86	
1947-49 average	246	223	384	262	319	195	214	246	270	108	
1950 average	224	187	402	280	276	200	185	232	256	100	
1951 average	243	220	436	335	339	193	239	264	302	107	
1952 average	244	227	432	309	296	195	254	267	288	101	
1952											
May	245	227	436	303	280	190	285	270	293	101	
June	238	226	437	319	289	220	250	277	292	102	
July	230	227	436	311	307	214	287	276	295	103	
August	236	233	436	319	310	206	229	272	295	103	
September	240	234	428	329	305	200	182	264	288	101	
October	240	219	429	311	304	215	189	260	282	100	
November	248	213	412	288	300	195	238	257	277	99	
December	247	218	428	268	300	206	256	257	269	96	
1953											
January	245	214	419	252	291	208	237	251	267	95	
February	240	206	424	255	287	209	237	247	263	94	
March	246	208	424	266	291	215	248	253	264	94	
April	244	206	424	266	289	226	204	247	259	93	
May	242	205	426	268	285	224	182	243	261	94	

¹ Federal Reserve Board: represents output of mining and manufacturing; monthly data adjusted for seasonal variation.

² Computed from reports of the Department of Commerce; monthly data adjusted for seasonal variation.

³ Bureau of Labor Statistics.

⁴ Farm wage rates simple averages of quarterly data, seasonally adjusted. ⁵ Revised.

⁶ Ratio of index of prices received to index of prices paid, interest, taxes, and wage rates. This parity ratio will not necessarily be identical to a weighted average percent of parity for all farm products, largely because parity prices for some products are on a transitional basis.

A Letter to Crop and Livestock Reporters

(Continued from page 14)

that the Crop Reporting Board had made a big error in reporting that the acreage to be planted to potatoes was 345,000,000 acres and should have been 375,000,000 acres. To those who know—like an experienced crop reporter—this is perfectly ridiculous on the face of it. To begin with, the total acreage of all 52 farm crops harvested in 1952 was only about 341,000,000 acres, and where this person got the figure of 345,000,000 acres of *potatoes alone* is a mystery to us. All I have got to say is that if we had 375,000,000 acres that this fellow says we should have reported in potatoes, or the 345,000,000 acres he said we estimated, you could lay them sideways 6 feet deep and 10 feet wide from here to yonder and still have enough left over to make Irish stew for Paul Bunyan—the legendary lumberjack of the Northwest—and his entire “hungry” crew for all next winter.

Now as a matter of fact, the record shows that in 1952 we reported only 1,398 thousand acres of potatoes harvested.

The reason I'm bringing this up is that every once in a while something of this sort gets started and a lot of people just pick up the statement that an error has been made; and you, and all of the rest of us, take a lot of criticism that is not justified, and it really hurts. It is surprising how these things can spread.

I ran into this report all the way from Washington, D. C., to Chicago, Ill., on a recent trip, and I'm afraid it is one of those weeds that is going to take a little time to dig out. I am passing it on so that you will recognize it and give a hand in straightening out anybody that may refer to it or criticize you for your reports.

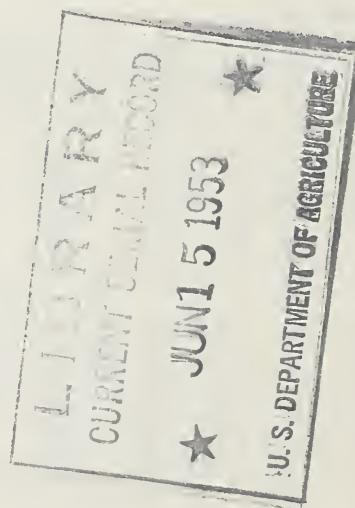
You should know that when we receive your schedules we try to do the very best job possible in putting them together and issue a report that is as reliable as we can make it. We do not claim that we are “accurate to the last bushel or last acre,” but we do know that the reports we issue are unbiased and are universally accepted as the best

estimates available. We know too, that if it were not for this reporting service farmers and the entire country would be flooded with statements and rumors as to crop conditions and production estimates many of which would be just about as wild as the story on potatoes. If your reports to your State Statistician didn't do anymore than stop a lot of wild rumors, they would be worth many times their cost; but, of course, they do a lot more than just stop rumors.

Well, I hope I have said enough to put you on guard . . . when you hear accusations, you can at least point out to the person that he'd better be sure his facts are straight before he plants any *weeds* in our service.

S. R. Newell, Chairman
Crop Reporting Board, BAE

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